

SIMPLE GIFTS

ALL SOULS UNITARIAN CHURCH OF TULSA, OKLAHOMA

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Freedom

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BREAKING FREE



Freedom is breaking out in the Middle East. It is inspiring to watch people rise up against tyranny to demand liberty and democracy and win them. But, as David Smith says so well in his article in this issue of *Simple Gifts*, achieving physical or political freedom is only the first step in a marathon of becoming free.

Unitarian Universalists have often seen something sacred and holy in the historic movements toward liberation of mind, body, and spirit. This theology first emerged from an interpretation of the biblical narrative in *Exodus*, in which God is seen as being on the side of the Jews' liberation from slavery. Even though the historical accuracy of this biblical tale is debatable, UUs have long seen this story as a powerful metaphor affirming that freedom and liberation are sacred and holy endeavors.

We see something sacred in movements such as the struggle against Roman persecution by 1st Century Christians to freely practice their religion. We see it also in the defense of scientists such as Copernicus and Galileo to freely practice

-by Rev. Marlin Lavanbar, Senior Minister

and teach science despite the opposition of the Catholic Church hierarchy. We see it in movements such as abolition in America, civil-rights around the world, women's rights, child-labor laws, the anti-apartheid in South Africa, and many other historic and contemporary struggles for basic freedoms.

Religious freedom in particular has been a core value in Unitarian Universalism throughout its history. One of the world's first, formal political decrees in support of religious freedom was advocated by the founder of Unitarianism, Francis David in 1568 at the Diet of Turda. The law was immediately enacted by history's one and only Unitarian monarch, John Sigismund of Transylvania. It is significant that at the one moment in history when Unitarians held power, they did not use it to spread their own faith; rather, they used it to secure the rights of others to believe as their conscience led them.



Francis David
at the Diet of Turda

Unfortunately, it is often true that hindsight is 20/20. It is much easier to see the sacredness of the movement toward freedom when we look back at history. In our own time, it is much more difficult to find consensus on which freedoms are truly sacred and how to ensure and protect them. The freedom

THE
All Souls
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Lenten Practices
Part II



Coming of Age:
Freedom In Action



Freedom is a
State of Mind



to marry who you choose, to terminate a pregnancy, to opt out of health insurance – these freedoms still stir controversy.

In that vein, may All Souls be a place where rigorous and thoughtful dialogue can happen as we do our part to witness and support freedoms unfolding. †

LENTEN PRACTICES FOR ALL SOULS (PART II)

-by Rev. Tamara Lebak, Associate Minister



On Wednesday, March 9, 2011, we entered into the 40 days of Lent. The word “Lent” comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *lenten*, or spring, the time of year when the days begin to lengthen. Lent itself is always the same period of time, but its starting date is tied to the movable feast of Easter and can be as early as February 4 or as late as March 10.

Lent is one of the most important seasons of the Christian liturgical calendar because it is an introspective period during which we take stock of our lives and our relationships. It is a time when we can celebrate the abundance of our lives by sacrificing for a period in order to make us more mindful and attentive to our blessings. Lent is a time to discover more about ourselves and our will and an opportunity to change ourselves as we prepare for Easter and the spring. This is a time to prepare ourselves for the coming season. How do Unitarians make ourselves ready?

The Lenten theme recalls Jesus’ 40 days in the wilderness and through them the discipline of self-denial reflecting the sacrifice of our will for a purpose greater than ourselves. It was during this time that Jesus went away into the desert for 40 days and 40 nights to pray and fast. It was during this time that Jesus was tempted by Satan to stray. During Lent we are encouraged to honor the life of Jesus by withholding something that we believe sustains us. Maybe we use sweets as a crutch, maybe it is watching television. The idea is to withhold whatever we use as a distraction that prevents us from being fully present or whatever pleasure we may be taking for granted.

If you are not quite sure how to practice the Christian tradition of Lent, the Lenten Practice Guide that I have devised might be of benefit to you during this time of reflection and awareness before Easter. You can try each one day by day or skim them all now to gather ideas for what you might give up for Lent. I suggest you give up one thing for the entire time and try the daily practices in addition to that single sacrifice. May this season bring your more awareness of how you move through the world.



LENT *Continues*

Day 21, Friday, April 1

Free your time...

Teach this triple truth to all: A generous heart, kind speech, and a life of service and compassion are the things which renew humanity.

~ Buddha

Give your time to someone else. This will look different for everyone. It may mean spending the day trying to help everyone around you. It may mean offering your undivided attention to those you love for a designated time. It may be donating your talent or time to do service work. Focus on the gift. Make time for Soulful Sundown tonight at 7:00 pm exploring the theme of Freedom.

Day 22, Saturday, April 2

Freedom from... money.

Money often costs too much. ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson.

With no pre-planning, try not to spend any money today. Eat what you have in your house (be creative), entertain yourself with board games, books, and company – maybe a potluck with others doing the same. We already have more than most. We spend money every day that we have already agreed to spend, rent/mortgage, utilities, the gas in our car. Try to make do today without spending an additional cent.

Fourth Sunday of Lent, Loetare Sunday, April 3

Freedom from... distraction.

Is the glass half empty or half full?

The fourth Sunday of Lent is Rejoice Sunday. It falls in the middle of Lent, paralleling Gaudete Sunday, midway through Advent. This Sunday reminds us we are halfway to the end. This is the time to recommit, to make the best of the time you have left, to get serious! If you gave up sweets for Lent and didn't make it past Valentine's Day, now is the time to reevaluate. What distraction could you remove from your life and sustain that sacrifice until the end of Lent? Come to church and rejoice with us. It is theme Sunday and we are talking about Freedom.

Day 23, Monday, April 4

Freedom in... prayer.

And keep up prayer in the two parts of the day and in the first hours of the night; surely good deeds take away evil deeds. This is a reminder to the mindful. ~The Holy Prophet 1.114, Quran

Many Muslims pray five times a day. Find five times to pray today and spend five minutes each time. Try reading a prayer that you like, sitting in silence, or reflecting on gratitude. Pay attention to your own resistance to the original plan. What is so important that it prevents you from making your prayer commitment?

**Day 24, Tuesday, April 5**

Freedom in... dreaming.

The best reason for having dreams is that in dreams no reasons are necessary.

~Ashleigh Brilliant

What is your heart's desire? Spend time today reflecting on your dreams. Journal or pray about it.

Day 25, Wednesday, April 6

Freedom through... listening.

We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak.

~Epictetus

From the moment you wake up until you fall asleep, focus on returning your attention to the sounds you hear. When engaged in conversation, try listening for the sake of understanding, not responding. When there is silence, see if you can hear the sound of your own breath or heartbeat. When there is sound, see if you can carry that sound of your breath and heartbeat into the background of your listening. Come to Wednesday night dinner, chapel, and classes. You might hear something new.

Day 26, Thursday, April 7

Freedom through... movement.

All truly great thoughts are conceived by walking.

~Friedrich Nietzsche

Walking upright separates us from most in the animal kingdom, and also creates only two contact points with the earth. Pay particular attention to your feet today. Walking meditation is a wonderful opportunity to become grounded in our bodies and connected to the world around us. Make time for a 20 minute walk. Write about it.

Day 27, Friday, April 8

Freedom in... nourishment.

The belly rules the mind.

~Spanish Proverb

Today, pay particular attention to food preparation. Instead of eating out, prepare all three meals and snacks at home. Eat nothing from a vending machine, restaurant, or convenience store. Spend today letting your mind rule your belly.

Day 28, Saturday, April 9

Freedom through... creativity.

Creativity is inventing, experimenting, growing, taking risks, breaking rules, making mistakes, and having fun.

~Mary Lou Cook

Take time today to creatively play. Paint, draw, sketch, color, bake, sing, garden. One thing we share in common with the nature of God is our ability to create.

Fifth Sunday of Lent April 10

Freedom... through the eyes of a child.

A hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove... but the world may be different because I was important in the life of a child.

~Forest Witcraft

If you have children, give them an hour of doing what they want to do with you. If you don't have children of your own, offer to spend time with a child in your life. What gift or talent of yours would you like to share with a child?

Day 29, Monday, April 11

Freedom through... celebrating family.

It is not flesh and blood but the heart which makes us fathers and sons.

~Johann Schiller

Write a letter or call a member of your family that you don't have enough opportunity to visit. Whether this is chosen family or blood relation, tell them how fortunate you are to have them in your life.



Day 30, Tuesday, April 12

Freedom through... exercise.

Movement is a medicine for creating change in a person's physical, emotional, and mental states.

~Carol Welch

Take the stairs. Park far away from your destination. Pace while you are on the phone. Take a walk at lunchtime. Try not to do anything today that keeps you immobile. Your heart will thank you.

Day 31, Wednesday, April 13

Freedom through... patience.

Patience is the companion of wisdom.

~Saint Augustine

Slow your pace of conversation. Take the time to count to at least

five after someone has spoken to you before you respond. You will be surprised. They may keep talking because you have given them the space to finish. You may say something different than you had intended. You may find that even five seconds is uncomfortable. Be patient with yourself. Relax. Try to build to 10 seconds. Focus on connecting with the person you are talking to during your pause. Relish the fact that you are both alive, in one another's presence, and able to have the conversation. Come to dinner, chapel, and classes tonight. Be with us in community.

Day 32, Thursday, April 14

Freedom by... chance.

No question is so difficult to answer as that to which the answer is obvious.

~George Bernard Shaw

Lectio divina is Latin for divine reading or "holy reading"

and represents a method of prayer and scriptural reading intended to engage with God and to provide spiritual insight. The principles of *lectio divina* were expressed around the year 220 AD by Origen who emphasized the value of reading scripture with attention to possible different levels of meaning. Choose a book that means something to you. Sit for a few minutes and focus on a question that is on your heart. With eyes closed, open the book at random and choose a point on the page. Open your eyes and read until something speaks to your situation. Sometimes focusing for a moment on content that has nothing to do with our situation allows our unconscious to speak.

Day 33, Friday, April 15

Freedom through... immersion.

Cleanliness is next to godliness.

~Ancient Proverb

When was the last time you took a long hot bath? Replace one of your regular weekend indulgences with time in the tub.

Day 34, Saturday, April 16

Freedom through... gratitude.

Today try to focus on the luck that you have had in your life. Can you even count your many blessings? How could you pass on some of your good fortune today?

Palm Sunday, April 17

Palm Sunday celebrates Jesus triumphantly entering into Jerusalem, knowing that he would indeed be betrayed and crucified. This Sunday is about meeting our lives head on, facing our struggles, our own mortality, and our limited time on this earth. Given our personal set of circumstances, how do we choose to respond? Jesus was treated like a king on his return. How can we honor the life we do have? **Attend Coming of Age Service at 10:00 am, and Palm Sunday Service at 11:30 am.**

Day 35, Monday, April 18, Holy Week

Freedom through... memorization

It is National Poetry Month. Find a poem that speaks to your heart and spend time memorizing it. Maybe you will only learn a few lines or maybe you will learn the entire poem. Share your poem with someone you love.

Day 36, Tuesday, April 19, Holy Week

Freedom through... seeing and being seen.

The eyes are the windows of the soul.

For this day of Holy Week, make a conscious effort to look into the eyes of everyone you encounter today. Whether they look away or linger, try to offer an eye of compassion to all those you meet. If you are uncomfortable, stick with it. If they are uncomfortable, love them anyway.

Day 37, Wednesday, April 20, Holy Week

Freedom by... caring for your vessel.

The greatest wealth is health.

~Virgil

Do something today that you have been putting off with regard to your regular health maintenance. Schedule a check up, have your cholesterol checked, schedule that dentist appointment, buy vitamins. What can you do to take better care of your health over the long haul? Your body is your temple. Treat it as a holy shrine.



Day 38, Thursday, April 21, Holy Week

Freedom through... friendship.

We should look for someone to eat and drink with before looking for something to eat and drink, for dining alone is leading the life of a lion or wolf.

~Epicurus

Invite others to share your evening meal. Don't go out of your way, simply share what you have or what you were already planning to make. Food goes a long way with good company. Focus on the company rather than the meal.

Day 39, Friday, April 22, Good Friday

Join us at noon for Tenebrae in All Souls Chapel. This mid-day service focuses on the juxtaposition of the darkness in the midst of light. This is a powerful service that leaves us in the darkness and in contemplation in preparation for Easter. How has the darkness manifested in your life? What do you do when it does? Many people fast this day.

Holy Saturday, April 23

Freedom in... stillness.

This day of Holy week was a day of finality. Jesus is dead. Darkness has fallen over the earth. This is our time to contemplate the darkness before we move to hope. Resurrection does not come without time in this place. Lie still, before falling asleep, when all is quiet and dark. Listen to the beat of your own heart that has been with you since before you were born and that will cease to beat someday. What legacy do you want to leave behind? What would be left undone if you had no more time?

Easter Sunday, March 24

You are alive! You have survived another Lenten season. You have succeeded and failed and practiced well. What will you do with the rest of this precious life? How have you been changed? What will you do differently now? May you walk away from our Lenten practices more awake, more aware, more free and more alive. Amen. †

FREEDOM IS A STATE OF MIND

-by David B. Smith, Associate Director of Music



What is freedom, what is it not, and how does it impact our lives? Freedom is contextual. Most people tend to think of freedom and its implications as a good thing. And in large part it is. What could be wrong with the ability to choose our own way and call the shots? That's *good*, right? In my opinion,

freedom is meaningful only when it is accompanied by other significant, supporting ideas. At what point are we really free? What does it mean to bask in the privileges and benefits of liberty? Freedom is really a state of mind.

Freedom is only accurately interpreted when surrounded by associated facts and circumstances. For instance, everyone who lives in the U.S. is supposedly free. But what of the slave after the Emancipation Proclamation?

Was he/she free? Technically yes. But what did that *mean* to a person who had never known anything but a life of bondage? After the slave is freed he is on his own to make progress in the world. But how? Where does he go? What does she do? For many years after the freeing of slaves there were former slaves who actually preferred to stay with their former owners and continue their lives in much the same way as before their emancipation. Why? Because it was all they knew. That was their life. Freedom is a state of mind.

Even further back in history we have the story in the Hebrew Scriptures of the Israelites exodus from Egypt. The book of Exodus depicts a group of newly-freed slaves who, even after gaining their independence – to leave their life of bondage and servitude to live and worship Yahweh – are found to be not only complaining and bickering, but even wishing they were back in Egypt!

They are free now, but where do they go? What do they do? They have never been on their own. The life to which they were accustomed was the one imposed upon them. Freedom, my friends, is a state of mind.

Now let's consider the present-day plight of the man or woman who is released from prison. Once freed these individuals are faced with the next step in their lives. But what is that? Where does he go? What does she do? We often find released prisoners back behind bars. Why? Because the only friends they *have* are the friends they *had* and dealing with this new life condition requires more skill than they currently possess. So, it's better (in their minds) to be back in a familiar situation than to learn something new or different.

The main challenge with external or physical freedom alone is that it creates a vacuum. It brings with it the overwhelming insecurity of being in a new and strange world. And it's often a world that does not view the newly liberated on equal footing. Thus, from this vantage point, we can peer into the mind-set of many others whose outward circumstances only serve as another form of bondage because of the internal chains in their thoughts.



Viktor Frankl, Holocaust survivor and author of *Man's Search for Meaning*, posits that people can, even under the worst circumstances, decide what will become of their lives – mentally and spiritually through their own power of choice. This is the key. If one is not free in mind they will never be free in time. It doesn't matter if there are no external barriers. True freedom comes in the ability to claim one's own power to make a decision.

But how is that power claimed? There is a powerful key found in the Gospel, John 8:32. Jesus said, "Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." In other words, when we come to perceive, experience, and understand the certainty of our connection to the Divine – to something larger than ourselves – then we are truly free. Freedom comes in knowing who we really are!

So what has to accompany freedom? Among others, there are three elements. They are knowledge, opportunity, and access. There has to be *knowledge* of self, soul, and the ability to choose to move forward in a positive direction. There has to be adequate *opportunity* for change, and *access* to what is freely shared by those who already know what it is to be free. How might we create more knowledge,

opportunity, and access for *All Souls*? Without these, external freedom often becomes the first chapter in a saga of one's return to bondage.

John F. Kennedy said that the best road to progress is freedom's road. But *freedom* is just the beginning. It is the assumed end of supposed physical restraint, but it is the starting line of a marathon. In that same race are other runners. Each of them only has what they've brought to the race through knowledge, opportunity, and access – physically,

mentally, and spiritually. So, our thoughts go out to those people, including the beautiful Egyptians who are struggling now for a new way of life. That struggle is just the beginning of what has to come. No one can truly be free unless it happens inside first. Why? Because true freedom is a state of mind. †



Daily Thoughts

APRIL 1

The secret of happiness is freedom. The secret of freedom is courage.

~Thucydides

APRIL 2

Freedom is not worth having if it does not include the freedom to make mistakes.

~Mahatma Gandhi

APRIL 3

I know but one freedom and that is the freedom of the mind.

~Antoine de Saint-Exupery

APRIL 4

Man is free at the moment he wishes to be.

~Voltaire

APRIL 5

While we are free to choose our actions, we are not free to choose the consequences of our actions.

~Stephen R. Covey

APRIL 6

The only way to deal with an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion.

~Albert Camus

APRIL 7

Man is a being with free will; therefore, each man is potentially good or evil, and it's up to him and only him (through his reasoning mind) to decide which he wants to be.

~Ayn Rand

APRIL 8

There are only two kinds of freedom in the world; the freedom of the rich and powerful, and the freedom of the artist and the monk who renounces possessions.

~Anais Nin

APRIL 9

Those who desire to give up freedom in order to gain security will not have, nor do they deserve, either one.

~Benjamin Franklin

APRIL 10

Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.

~Martin Luther King Jr.

APRIL 11

We must not believe the many, who say that only free people ought to be educated, but we should rather believe the philosophers who say that only the educated are free.

~Epictetus

APRIL 12

To know how to free oneself is nothing; the arduous thing is to know what to do with one's freedom.

~Andre Gide

APRIL 13

Freedom lies in being bold.

~Robert Frost

APRIL 14

No free man shall ever be debarred the use of arms.

~Thomas Jefferson

APRIL 15

Freedom is nothing but a chance to be better.

~Albert Camus

APRIL 16

Every human has four endowments: self awareness, conscience, independent will, and creative imagination. These give us the ultimate human freedom... The power to choose, to respond, to change.

~Stephen R. Covey

- APRIL 17
All good things are wild, and free. ~Henry David Thoreau
- APRIL 18
There is no such thing as a little freedom. Either you are all free, or you are not free. ~Walter Cronkite
- APRIL 19
No one is free, even the birds are chained to the sky. ~Bob Dylan
- APRIL 20
A library is an arsenal of liberty. ~Anonymous
- APRIL 21
Freedom is not worth having if it does not connote freedom to err. It passes my comprehension how human beings, be they ever so experienced and able, can delight in depriving other human beings of that precious right. ~Mahatma Gandhi
- APRIL 22
Freedom is the will to be responsible to ourselves. ~Friedrich Nietzsche
- APRIL 23
Freedom is the right to tell people what they do not want to hear. ~George Orwell
- APRIL 24
Freedom is not something that anybody can be given; Freedom is something that people take and people are as free as they want to be. ~James Baldwin
- APRIL 25
People demand freedom of speech as a compensation for the freedom of thought which they seldom use. ~Soren Kierkegaard
- APRIL 26
The cost of freedom is always high, but Americans have always paid it. And one path we shall never choose, and that is the path of surrender, or submission. ~John F. Kennedy
- APRIL 27
Freedom is not procured by a full enjoyment of what is desired, but by controlling the desire. ~Epictetus
- APRIL 28
Everything that is really great and inspiring is created by the individual who can labor in freedom. ~Albert Einstein
- APRIL 29
You can have peace. Or you can have freedom. Don't ever count on having both at once. ~Robert A. Heinlein
- APRIL 30
You can't separate peace from freedom because no one can be at peace unless he has his freedom. ~Malcolm X



on Freedom

CONVERSATIONS WITH JOHN

-by Phil Haney

In honor and celebration of John Wolf's 50th year here at All Souls, Phil Haney has monthly conversations with John, then relates to us some stories that beg to be passed on – straight from the pastor's mouth.



John Wolf bristles at the notion that “freedom’s just another word for nothin’ left to lose.” In sharp contrast, Wolf, Minister Emeritus at All Souls, reminds us that religious freedom is bestowed without warranty, and with risk of loss. Dr. Wolf knows that religious freedom is the keystone of all other freedoms.

From the freedom to worship – to freely exercise religion, to possess this right – one (including those who don’t exercise the privilege) has the opportunity to realize a full life. Our freedom is precious; and not to be taken for granted.

Religious freedom is expressed in numerous ways in the U.S. The freedom of the relationship among Unitarian churches, ministers who are called by church congregations to serve, and the memberships served by the ministers, reflects a dynamic and unique balance of rights. In fact, Wolf says the Unitarian polity of freedom is a radical idea of religious democracy.

Freedom for a Unitarian minister is not doctrinal, but Wolf says it derives from *midrashim* proclaiming that God was the god of the people who covenant to obey him to the point of death. The “man to God” idolatry eventually gave way to “God to man” Christianity and to the various forms of it seen today. But Wolf makes it clear that Unitarian polity took a unique path, and that the UU covenant between minister and church expresses a special kind of religious freedom.

The early history of Unitarian polity was based on a covenant relationship between minister and congregation: *I will be your minister, you will be my congregation; but don't be confused; you have given me absolute authority to say what I believe, without restriction.* Wolf says this trade-off of covenant authority was a radical idea exercised by the early Unitarian churches (many of which were lay-led fellowships).



All Souls has never been a lay-led fellowship. It is a church in the traditional sense. The church’s polity authorizes the congregation to have absolute authority, subject to some proscription, and as may be delegated to the board of trustees. The congregation hires (calls) – and exclusively can fire – the minister. This structure is congregational, but there is a significant distinction between Unitarian congregational polity and the polity of other congregational churches. Generally, congregational churches impose doctrinal tests/restrictions on their ministers. Unitarian churches do not set doctrinal tests for ministers. The pulpit is free at All Souls – as free as it gets. The authority to exercise the freedom responsibly belongs to the minister, and does not arise from any other person or body.

Dr. Wolf describes the pulpit space in the All Souls sanctuary as the freest four square feet on the face of the earth. It is circumscribed with authority by the congregation. Whoever occupies the space has the authority and freedom to do with it as he or she pleases. There have been times when the space was occupied by lay persons, and Wolf shares some rich history about those days at All Souls.

The polity at All Souls remains the same, but some of the church's practices have changed. Wolf remembers vividly how, throughout his ministry, the church suspended sanctuary services during the summer vacation period, but permitted lay Sunday services in the chapel, when members and guests led services, gave sermons, exercised the freedom, and connected with the congregation by saying what they wanted to say. These services featured veterans returning from Vietnam (including Clayton Vaughn – who, Wolf says, gave a heart-rending lay sermon about the war), scientists, historians, social activists and, yes, member minister-wannabes who enjoyed their temporary authority.

Once, as a fund-raising gesture in the early '70s, Wolf offered his pulpit for a Sunday to the highest bidder at an auction to raise money for a local charity. The winning bidder gave the pulpit to her son, a physician whose personal cause was euthanasia. The doctor used the space – and the authority that went with it – to preach to a packed house. All Souls was just starting television at this

time, and the doctor's sermon was televised. It was well promoted and popular beyond expectation. The success of the event – including the use of TV by the church to broadcast it – gave rise to a television series hosted by the doctor, called "Right to Die." Wolf also credits these events with the continuing success of All Souls' use of media.

The point of this story, says Wolf, is that the person standing in the space has full authority to exercise the freedoms that accompany it. Wolf is quick to agree that some ministers' contracts today might refine the "say what I believe without restriction" covenant, but he is emphatic that the inherent authority of the minister is true, absolute, and free.

When Marlin Lavanhar was called as senior minister of All Souls, John Wolf preached the installation sermon. In a strong message, he reminded the congregation of the unique polity of the church, and of the freedom of the pulpit – Marlin's pulpit – free and clear, unencumbered by doctrine. The congregation understood the trade – what was ceded to the minister – and heard the charge that to whom much is given, much is expected.

Wolf says religious freedom comes first; that all else flows from this precept. The polity of the Unitarian church's relationship between minister and congregation is the vanguard of religious freedom. †



*The pulpit is free
at All Souls...
as free as it gets.*

COMING OF AGE: FREEDOM IN ACTION

-by John Connelly, *Coming of Age Teacher*



In the early 1990s, after four years working in the Youth Department as both an advisor and member of the Youth Board, I thought I would take a break while my wife Sandy and I started our family. But instead, a conversation with then Religious Education Director Kathy Keith on how we might improve the Ninth Grade Religious Education Graduation Ceremony led to an 18-year commitment teaching our 9th graders.

It began right after the Rev. Dr. John Wolf's retirement. During his tenure, the 9th grade class met monthly with Dr. Wolf. The other Sundays of the month included art-focused education, such as photography with Robert Billings. After Dr. Wolf's retirement, the Children's Religious Education Department developed a curriculum that focused on Unitarian Universalism to share with the 9th graders every Sunday morning.

During these years, Senior Minister Rev. Brent Smith began to emphasize the spiritual development of our youth during the liminal stage prior to adulthood, and the program expanded to two hours. Throughout these years, the Graduation Ceremony consisted of our youth reading assigned excerpts from famous Unitarians and various American presidents. One idea we had was to choose numerous readings significant to our UU heritage and let the youth *select* from them a reading they connected with to present to the congregation during graduation. I thought this would create more ownership on the part of the youth and more interest and variety for the congregation. While all of the selections were excellent and significant, it is a difficult task to get teenagers excited about reading the words of dead people – no matter how significant they are.

A decade ago, as we were walking down the center aisle of the sanctuary following Rev. Marlin Lavanhar's first Graduation Ceremony, he turned to me and said, "Next

year we will have them do credos." My co-teachers, Barbara Dondiego Stewart and Scott Keith, and I had finally gotten the change we were looking for. Now all we had to do was figure what a credo was.

Coming of Age

Be careful what you ask for. Handing out readings is a lot easier for the teachers and youth than developing a credo. Now, teachers take the role of spiritual guide, or coach, to help enable our youth to discover their gifts and values as they develop and prepare to present their credos. And the program has expanded even more. In addition to our Sunday morning lessons on Unitarian Universalism history and philosophy, we have added a fall VisionqUUest campout, to connect youth to nature and each other outside familiar surroundings; a winter retreat to give our youth the opportunity to interact on a deeper level with our ministers; and a Spring Break pilgrimage to Boston, the American home of Unitarian Universalism. It takes a village to raise a child, and it takes dedicated teachers, parent guides (Pat and Jane Newman), engaged and engaging ministers, and a dynamic Youth Director to guide our youth in theology, UU heritage, and personal awareness, all integral parts of the credo-writing process. This process culminates with youth reading their credo statements, this year on **April 17**, during the Coming of Age Service in the Sanctuary.



Freedom in Action

As Unitarian Universalists, we have the freedom and the responsibility to search for truth and meaning that speaks most forcefully to each of us and stirs us to positive action. This congregation stands behind that freedom of conscience by teaching our youth the responsibility we each have to develop our own religious thoughts. Then, we have the trust to allow our youth to deliver their credos in front of the congregation. This combination of freedom, responsibility, and trust produces amazing results. My hope each year is that the class delivers a variety of credos that reflect the intent of our denomination to, as William Ellery Channing states, “not indoctrinate our youth but to stir their minds.”

I like to think of the credos from our youth as the first seedlings they develop as a result of the care and nourishment from parents, family, ministers, school teachers, coaches, adult leaders, friends, and the All Souls Religious Education and Youth Departments. Some elements of their credos may change over time, but it is very powerful for the youth – and the congregation – to document this point in their personal and spiritual development.

This is my last year as full-time Coming of Age teacher. Over the past 18 years, I have taught with Sandy Connelly, Robert Billings, Sally Trecek, Claudia Arthrell, Scott Keith, Laura Hailey Butler, Renee Deck, Barbara Dondiego Stewart, and Kristin Young as well as members of the current CoA team, Tanner Phillips and Amanda Faith. I am very thankful for their companionship and contributions to making this program better. I leave hoping I have had some impact in helping our youth develop a firm foundation for their spiritual growth, and knowing that the next generation of Coming of Age teachers – Tanner and Amanda along with J. Pat Murphy and Lisa Perrault – will continue to make the Coming of Age program even stronger. †

I have not only been involved in the development of the Coming of Age curriculum and teaching, I have participated along with the youth in their learning experiences. I did not just coach our youth in writing their credos, I have continually worked on my own.

*My Name is John Connelly,
and this is my Credo:*



*I believe the challenge of life
is to find the connections
between people and all living things.
God is not a person
living in heaven,
but is a spirit,
found in these connections.*

*To find God
you must first know yourself,
your gifts, and your talents,
then use them to help improve
what you care about
and strengthen connections.*

*I believe the only sin is selfishness.
To intentionally put yourself
before others
breaks these connections.
We must pay attention
to personal needs,
and even some material needs,*

to rejuvenate ourselves so that we can continue helping others.

*God has created an infinite number of connections.
For a person to believe that their own path of connectedness is
the only true path is a form of selfishness.
To meet the challenge of life we need to seek out multiple paths
to God so that we find our own path and can connect with
others whose paths differ from our own.*

*I have a strong desire and ability to learn and I use this to
teach others so that their life is easier and that they can then
improve and achieve more than me.*

ALL SOULS READS...



When I was a youngster growing up in Sapulpa, I watched “Lewis Meyer’s Bookshelf” on Sunday mornings before church.” Just before the show ended, Lewis Meyer would gaze into the camera and say, “Remember: The more books you read, the taller you’ll grow!” Later in life when I visited

his bookstore on Peoria, I discovered Lewis Meyer was a diminutive man. So, his sign-off was a personal testimony that one’s physical appearance does not determine who one is – *you can’t judge a book by its cover.*

This memory springs to mind because I wonder sometimes how we, as a church, see ourselves. We say, “Come to All Souls and feel what freedom feels like!” We also say, “Everyone (and I do mean everyone) is included in God’s love!” Wow! What a great place to be free and loved.

But... “Can we *talk?*” someone might ask. “I feel tall but I look small. Am I being judged before I get a chance? And why do I feel I have to impress you before we move into relationship? Does my race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or income cloud your vision so much that you really don’t see the free and loving me?” I raise these questions because so many of you reading this article have also asked them.

All Souls Reads came about to create a vehicle to move us past the introductions and into the heart of what it takes

-by Rev. Gerald L. Davis, Adjunct Minister

to be inclusive. We chose the vehicle of books because *All Souls reads.* Whatever and whoever got you started, you will not quit no matter the limitation. You read everything, from signs to tweets to memoirs. Books, ebooks, audiobooks, it doesn’t matter. The intent of a group all reading the same book is to spur us to dialogue about those issues that seem to come up whenever we get serious about privilege, power, and difference.

Alan Johnson, in his work *Privilege, Power and Difference*, tells us that we have *fear* when we talk about those things. The fear comes from feeling something might happen when the dominant group feels uncomfortable. He challenges the assumption that people are naturally afraid of what they don’t know or understand. People are curious, and difference, in itself, is not troubling. What is troubling is how people *use* difference to value or devalue, credit or discredit, reward or punish, elevate or oppress. We read selected books to engage each other in the crucial conversations this church is not, I believe, afraid to have.

The book we have chosen for April’s theme of Freedom is *Shell Shaker* by LeAnne Howe. Here’s a teaser from Wikipedia: *A novel by an enrolled member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma interweaves two tales of murder involving flawed Choctaw political leaders set more than 200 years apart in the mid-18th century and 1991, connected through the peacemaking Billy family. According to the author, “Shell Shaker is a book about power, its misuse, and how a community responds.”* This month, join us on **April 17** (since the fourth Sunday is Easter) at 1:30 pm in Room 201. It’s time to grow. †

Our church program-year (September-May) is fashioned around nine theological themes. Each theme plays a part in the development of a well-grounded religious and spiritual life. The church’s offerings each month are by no means limited to the themes. However, these topics provide an axis around which many elements of church life gain more meaning and depth. They provide us with a set of common stories and ideas that become elements of an ongoing community conversation. Be warned: Seriously engaging these themes could transform your life!

September - VISION
October - EVIL
November - DEMOCRACY
December - GOD
January - CREATION
February - RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY
March - REDEMPTION
April - FREEDOM
May - MERCY

Recommended Reading on Freedom

Holy Hullabaloo: A Road Trip to the Battlegrounds of the Church/State Wars

by Jay Wexler

Beacon Press, 2009

Prayer in schools? Animal sacrifices in public? Ten Commandments on the courthouse lawn? Jay Wexler has seen it all. With a mix of awe and skepticism as well as large doses of humor, Jay Wexler searches for what really happened in some of our gnarliest disputes about just how high to build the wall between Church and government.

First Freedom First: A Citizen's Guide to Protecting Religious Liberty and the Separation of Church and State

by C. Welton Gaddy and Barry W. Lynn

Beacon Press, 2008

The United States is the most religiously diverse nation in the world, due in large part to the clauses of the First Amendment that guarantee freedom for and from religion. In *First Freedom First*, with clear language and recognizable examples, two of the most trusted voices on church-state separation address head-on the many areas where religion and politics overlap with consequences for all Americans.

The Court and the Cross: The Religious Right's Crusade to Reshape the Supreme Court

by Frederick S. Lane

Beacon Press, 2008

"Nowhere has the religious right's effort to remake America been more successful, or more poorly understood, than in its campaign to control the courts: a campaign rooted in a revisionist history that seeks to write secularism out of the nation's past. Frederick Lane's illuminating, important work punctures the movement's canards and deftly explains what's at stake."
-Michelle Goldberg, author of *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism*

For Kids

Tomas the Cow

by Pietrapiana

(bilingual book), ages 4-8

Tired of being hooked to a milking machine, Tomasa the one-horned cow leaves the farm on a quest to find freedom.

The Big Box

by Toni Morrison

ages 9-12

When others try to determine the boundaries of personal freedom for a group of youngsters, the grown-ups create a world inside a box. A world with toys and games, and treats and gifts, and all kinds of stuff they think children need to be happy and carefree – everything from a picture of the sky to jelly beans and brand new jeans. But all they really want is the freedom to be themselves.

Young Fredle

by Cynthia Voigt

ages 9-12

Fredle, a young mouse cast out of his home, faces dangers and predators outside, makes some important discoveries and allies, and learns the meaning of freedom as he struggles to return home.

Carolina Crow Girl

by Valerie Hobbs

ages 10-14

Eleven-year-old Carolina lives on an old school bus. In the field where her family has parked this time, she finds a baby crow and decides to keep him. She also finds friendship with Stefan, a lonely boy who is confined to a wheelchair. In this beautifully written, moving novel, the author explores the fine line between safety and stagnation, rootlessness and freedom.

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- 1) Submit your text electronically via email in plain (unformatted) text. 500 word limit.
- 2) Include your name and daytime number.
- 3) Not all submissions will be published. Submissions may be edited for length.



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April Highlights

- April 1 Soulful Sundown - *Freedom Train*
- April 3 All Souls 303 - *Joining the Church*
- April 6 ROOTS series begins (*All Souls 202*)
- April 7 Senior Game Day
- April 9 Supper Club (All member dinner: at church)
- April 10 New Member Recognition Sunday
- April 12 Open Women's Group
- April 13 Open Branches Group
- April 14 Dal Alliance
- April 15 Parents' Night Out
- Evening of Praise
- Coffeehouse: Malford Miligan Band
- April 16 Day Alliance's *Flapper Fling*
- April 17 All Souls 101
- All Souls Reads
- LGBT & Allies Potluck
- April 22 Good Friday Tenebrae Service
- April 24 Easter Sunday
- April 26 Evening Alliance
- April 28 Living Well, Dying Well series begins
- Board of Trustees
- April 30 Seminary for a Day with Brandon Scott

SEE INSIDE FOR

PARISH NOTES

The All Souls Weekly Bulletin

Explore the intersection of music, arts, & spirituality

Freedom Train

SOULFUL SUNDOWN

April 1, 7:00 pm

Featuring:
70s Soul Music

Childcare available by advance reservation: (918) 743-2805, ext 308
All Souls Unitarian Church 2952 S. Peoria, Tulsa, OK 74114 www.AllSoulsChurch.org